The Republic's Renegades: Dutch Converts to Islam in Seventeenth-Century Diplomatic Relations with North Africa

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Abstract:

This paper explores the ways in which Dutch converts to Islam acted as informants, intermediaries and at times even informal diplomats for the Dutch Republic, a newcomer to Mediterranean trade and diplomacy. It asks how these renegades, who often occupied high ranks in the North African corsairing fleets and local positions of power, facilitated and shaped Dutch-North African relations. The article explores the renegades' diplomatic services, follows them as they (re)establish contact with the Dutch Republic, and analyzes how they fashioned themselves as cross-confessional mediators. Far from being marginal figures caught in the dichotomy of a Christian past and a Muslim present, Dutch renegades operated as part of a continuum that encompassed both the Islamic Mediterranean and the Dutch Republic.

Keywords: renegades; diplomacy; early modern Mediterranean; Ottoman North Africa; Salé; Dutch Republic; corsairing

Introduction

Between 1661 and 1663 the painter Reinier Nooms accompanied the fleet of Dutch Admiral Michiel de Ruyter to Tunis and Algiers. De Ruyter's assignment was to conclude a new treaty with the North African polities by combining diplomacy with a display of Dutch naval power. Nooms' role was that of an "embedded artist": he collected strategic information in sketches of North African harbors which he later turned into imposing paintings for the Amsterdam Admiralty, such as this *View of Algiers*. (Figure 1) The paintings share a common perspective: De Ruyter's warships are dominant in the foreground while the fortified North African harbors present an impenetrable and defensive background. [Fig.1 here] These are stereotypical representations of Christian Europe's struggle against the corsair nests of the Islamic Maghreb, yet one of Nooms' drawings presents a more complex scene. It shows one of the mission's rare moments on land when De Ruyter's crew visited the ancient city of Carthage, close to Tunis. (Figure 2) [Figure 2 here] In the foreground the artist has drawn himself, sketching the ruins of Hannibal's palace. He has put aside his weapon, and the nonbelligerent atmosphere is emphasized in the background where Dutch rowers admire the Roman and Punic ruins in the company of the "renegade Bairam alias Jan Willemse from Amsterdam." Contemporaries used the pejorative term "renegade" to indicate a person who had renounced his or her faith, usually, but not exclusively, referring to those who converted to Islam. In this case it seems that the Amsterdam-born convert accompanied his countrymen to the site,

perhaps acting as their guide.

This article focuses on figures like Bairam/Jan Willemse, on Dutch converts to Islam, many of whom changed their religion to join the corsairing fleets of North Africa. Nooms' visit to Carthage took place in February 1662 during Dutch-Tunisian treaty negotiations. Bairam does not appear to have played any diplomatic role of importance, but another Dutch convert, Admiral Joseph Rais, born as Gerrit Jacobsz in the town of Enkhuizen, represented Tunis during these negotiations. De Ruyter was under formal orders to capture and kill all renegades, yet he not only encountered converted compatriots as negotiators for the opposite side; they also played a crucial role in his own diplomatic affairs. In 1663, in Algiers, De Ruyter secretly invited converted Dutch corsairs on board to ask their opinions on the durability of the treaty he had concluded after protracted negotiations. He sent this information to the States General, the ruling body of the Dutch Republic, and used it to plan his own course of action.

The aim of this article is to gauge the ways in which Dutch converts to Islam acted as informants, intermediaries and at times even informal diplomats, thereby facilitating and shaping cross-confessional diplomatic relations between the North African polities and the Protestant Dutch Republic, a relative newcomer to Mediterranean affairs. I will focus mainly on the first half of the seventeenth century, when the peak in corsairing activities coincided with the first Mediterranean commercial and diplomatic ventures of the Dutch. While the United Provinces had no direct territorial stake in the Mediterranean and were primarily motivated by commercial considerations, their fraught relations with Habsburg Spain opened up the possibility of Protestant-Muslim alliances.

Tracing renegade corsairs is not easy: this is partly due to a relative lack of (surviving) North African archival material, partly also to the nature of their profession. For instance, the Dutchman Claes Compaen, operating out of Moroccan Salé, boasted that he destroyed all traces of his activities by throwing shipping logs and other records of captured vessels overboard. Although Muslim corsairs operating out of North Africa legally had the right to take enemy ships as prizes, the identity of crews and passengers and the ownership of goods and ships were frequently unclear and contested. What is more, the corsairs of the Ottoman subsidiaries Tunis, Tripoli, and Algiers frequently ignored the diplomatic treaties that the central administration in Istanbul concluded with European states, while considering their own bilateral treaties of limited duration. Preserving documents thus could prove risky, as in practice the line between corsairing and piracy was often blurred.

This documentary imbalance means that European representational texts and inquisitorial records, which often cast the renegades as stereotypical traitors or religious opportunists, have commanded a disproportionate amount of attention. For the seventeenth-century Dutch case inquisitorial records do not exist; at the same time, early modern Dutch authors showed remarkably little interest in the renegade as a literary figure, in stark contrast to, for example, the English. A broader variety of sources, including diplomatic correspondence, peace treaties, and shipping logs as well as several letters by the converts themselves, offers the

possibility to go beyond renegade stereotypes and investigate their (diplomatic) activities after conversion.

Converted Corsairs

Whereas coerced conversion fitted European narratives of an aggressive Islam, voluntary apostasy did not, yet it was a pervasive phenomenon in the Ottoman Empire and the independent kingdom of Morocco. Conversion by pronouncing the *shahada* (declaration of faith), and usually circumcision if the convert was male, was often followed by taking a new name, gifts of clothing and money, marriage to a Muslim spouse, and integration into local patronage networks. Changing faith was not just a religious, but also a social and political practice during which converts constructed ties with their new religious community. But the distinction between "forced" and "voluntary" conversion was not necessarily straightforward. Coercion could take the form of physical force, but political, social, economic, and fiscal necessities could also function as coercive factors of conversion. In the Ottoman Balkans the most likely candidate for conversion was "a single man moving from the countryside to the city in search of work and suitable social and patronage networks." A similar pattern is discernable in North Africa: men, often with maritime experience, moved to its ports, converted, and joined the corsairing fleets searching for economic gains, social ascent, and perhaps levels of political power that they could never hope to obtain in their native countries.

Early modern European authors denounced these converts as opportunistic deniers of the Christian religion, while North African collective memory celebrated their achievements. In his late-seventeenth-century history of Tunis, Ibn Abi Dinar attributed the successes of the Tunisian fleet in the century's first decades to the converted captains Wardiyya, the Englishman John Ward, and Samson, a Dutchman. As late as 1682, Algerian corsairing ships carried the names of that same Samson, dead since 1624, and of the Dutch corsair Simon de Danser, who had died in 1611. The renegades' contributions to Muslim societies was a recurring trope in early modern narratives but has also played a dominant role in modern historiography. In the eyes of Fernand Braudel and others, English and Dutch converts, particularly, were agents of a technological revolution, introducing Northern European ships and sailing techniques to North Africa and rendering the corsair fleets more dangerous.

The emphasis on the renegades' contributions to North African polities, however, has obscured the fact that, after conversion, renegades often kept or constructed ties to their native countries in differing ways and degrees. Their new names frequently include references to past professions or ethnic origins; some converts maintained business relations or correspondence with Christian family members and friends. In fact, most recent studies emphasize the liminal position of converts and their ability to cross and re-cross not just religious but also political and social boundaries. It is this ability that has seen them cast as yet another category of cultural intermediaries or brokers. As Jocelyne Dakhlia has

pointed out, however, this categorization confirms the notion of a cultural gap between Muslim and Christian polities in need of being bridged, while also underscoring the "in-betweenness" and marginality of the intermediaries. Instead, she advocates for an approach that sees a continuum between Muslim and Christian societies. The ensuing discussion will demonstrate how certain renegades combined positions of power in North Africa with continued or renewed contacts with the Dutch Republic to make themselves indispensable as diplomatic intermediaries, while at the same time shedding light on the scope of their mediation and strategies of self-fashioning as mediators.

The Dutch and the Islamic Mediterranean

During the early phases of the Dutch Revolt (1568-1648) its leader William of Orange stated that he would welcome aid from anyone against Spain, even a Muslim, while Dutch rebels sported the slogan "Better a Turk than a Papist." Such statements were obviously tropes in anti-Spanish and anti-Catholic propaganda, but gradually the Protestant Republic formed closer alliances with Muslim polities. After having defeated the Spaniards at the Zeeland town of Sluis in 1604, the Dutch liberated a group of Muslim rowers from Spanish galleys and paid for their journey back to Algiers and Morocco. Two envoys accompanied them, carrying letters asking for the liberation of all Dutch captives without payment of ransom. The Dutch had become a commercial presence in the Mediterranean during the 1590s as part of what has been dubbed the "Northern Invasion." While this allowed them to take advantage of the lucrative Mediterranean trade, it also exposed their vessels to corsairing. Although the 1604 liberation of the "Turks" did not cause any Dutchmen to be freed, it did become part of a shared diplomatic rhetoric, symbolizing the starting point of mutual relations. Kapudan pasha (Admiral) Khalil Pasha, for example, cited this episode as the start of Ottoman-Dutch friendship in his letter to the States General and Prince Maurice of Orange in 1610, while the envoy Jan Wendelsz still referred to it in his negotiations with Tunis in 1630.

The truce with Spain, signed in 1609, provided the Dutch with *de facto* independence, allowing them to develop a diplomatic network. They signed a treaty with Morocco's Sultan Mulay Zaydan in 1610, received Ottoman capitulations (*ahdname*) in 1612, and concluded treaties with the Ottoman regencies Algiers and Tunis in 1622. Shared hostility towards Spain continued to be a driving force in these relations. The treaty with Morocco, especially, was intended to maintain military pressure on Spain, truce notwithstanding. Yet the primary concern of the States General - which represented, and to a large extent consisted of, the Republic's commercial elite - was to safeguard Dutch shipping. The 1612 capitulations, granted by Sultan Ahmed I, consequently contained extensive guarantees against corsairing from Ottoman subsidiaries. These guarantees, however, did little to increase the safety of the Dutch mercantile fleet.

Cornelis Haga, the Dutch ambassador in Istanbul, quickly realized that his diplomatic efforts produced few results in North Africa. In 1613 he wrote to The

Hague that although the Ottoman governors in the regencies declared themselves willing to adhere to the capitulations, the local corsair captains (*raïs*) and ship-owners had other interests. Advised by high-ranking, pro-Dutch Ottoman officials, Haga counseled the States General to engage in direct diplomatic relations with the Maghreb. Letters from the Tunisian rulers to The Hague stressed the same point. Consequently, in 1617 a first Dutch consul was sent to the combined posts of Algiers and Tunis.

The States General and the first generation of Dutch diplomats had little insight into the characteristics of the different North African polities. Dutch representatives in the Ottoman subsidiaries found themselves in an unclear situation: first, they had to conclude new, bilateral treaties, although formally the capitulations were still valid; second, they had to operate in frequently tense and instable political situations where the objectives of the Ottoman administrative and military elite often did not coincide with those of the *raïs*, the subsidiaries' main economic and maritime force. In Morocco, on the other hand, civil strife caused sultanic authority to crumble, allowing the Atlantic port of Salé to develop into a semi-independent corsairing center with little regard for treaties. The Dutch state and its representatives relied on the information transmitted by (liberated) Dutch captives and the network of Jewish traders. Dutch renegades, who were often embedded in the local power structures, became a crucial source for up-to-date inside information.

Dutch Renegades

It is difficult to determine exactly how many Dutch renegades settled in North Africa, but they clearly became a significant presence in the early decades of the seventeenth century. The Twelve Years' Truce (1609-1621) with Spain, which temporarily halted direct hostilities, was of crucial importance: while it might have been good for international trade, it took away the livelihood of hundreds of privateers, who had been hunting for Spanish ships with letters of marque from the States General. Many of these experienced sailors were unable or unwilling to find employment in Dutch mercantile shipping or the hierarchical world of the navy, opting instead to convert and move to the North African corsairing centers. In April 1611 the States of Holland discussed the fact that one Simon Maartsszoon Stuijt served as the captain of several corsairing ships in the Bay of Marmora; in 1613, a Dutch captive reported that eight of the thirty-five ships of the Algerian corsairing fleet were commanded by Dutch *raïs*; in 1625-1626, a Dutch envoy reported that eight of the fifty Algerian *raïs* hailed originally from the Low Countries, including Seffer Rais alias Thomas the Pickpocket from Harlingen, Regeb Rais from The Hague, and Seliman Buffoen alias Jacob the Brothelkeeper from Rotterdam.

Dutch corsair captains favored sailing with a crew consisting of compatriots. They often actively recruited other Dutch seamen, which at times resulted in veritable renegade genealogies. In the early 1600s, for instance, Simon de Danser,

who probably did not convert, drafted the Dutchman *De Veenboer* alias Soliman Rais, who in 1618 recruited the former Dutch privateer Jan Jansz van Haarlem. Jansz converted, took the name of Moerad Rais, married a Muslim woman—despite having a wife and family back in Haarlem—and took over command of Soliman's ships. Throughout his North African career, Moerad continued the practice of actively drafting and converting compatriots. In 1620, for instance, a ship's carpenter, also from Haarlem, resided in Algiers for six months, where he frequently spent time with his former townsman Moerad. The renegade repeatedly tried to convince the carpenter to convert, promising that, after circumcision, he could join the corsairs and earn the same money as a born "Turk."

The Dutch state's reaction to these renegade Dutchmen was ambiguous: while preachers worried about the allure of Islam and recommended that only seamen "well rooted and instructed […] in Christ" should sail to the Mediterranean, the States General realised that conversion was, to some degree, unavoidable. The 1612 capitulations extended by the Ottomans to the Dutch included—perhaps for the first time—articles that regulated the conversion of free men to Islam. They stipulated that when Dutch merchants converted, a dragoman employed by the Dutch ambassador had to be present to verify the voluntary nature of the procedure. The 1626 Algerian-Dutch treaty also indicated that Dutchmen could not be converted by force, but that they could "turn Turk of their own free will." It further specified that Christian corsairs could not operate out of Algiers, but that after conversion they "could do as they please."

With the renegades' conversion and sphere of action in the Mediterranean regulated, there remained one thorny issue for the States General to consider: what to do with converts to Islam who returned to the Dutch Republic? This was not a hypothetical issue: renegades arrived in Dutch ports, probably with a certain regularity; some even joined the Dutch navy to fight the Spanish. The debate's immediate cause was the arrival in Zeeland in 1623 of two ships of renegades, wishing to take on supplies and sell booty. While the renegades' presence presented an ideological problem, the French ship they had taken as a prize proved a significant political embarrassment: the French ambassador protested vehemently, and Dutch ships were sequestered in French harbors. Under pressure, the States General arrested several renegades. The case dragged on for two years before the States reached the decision that any renegade on Dutch territory would be put to death at the stake. They had decided on this harsh punishment after consulting the Moroccan ambassador, Yussef Biscaino, who reported that Muslims who converted to Christianity out of "spite" suffered the same fate.

The States' decision, however, stood at odds with the treaties with Morocco and the Ottomans that allowed Muslim corsairs to use Dutch harbors to buy supplies. The punishment, in fact, was never executed. Instead, while declaring renegades to be "odieus" (reprehensible) the States General freed the arrested converts and had their ships escorted out of Zeeland. Subsequently they wrote to Haga, the Algerian *pasha*, and Ambassador Biscaino, asking them to prevent any more renegades from coming to the Republic with French or English prizes. In dealing with renegades, the Dutch central authorities steered a course between

commercial concerns and diplomatic obligations, with religious sensitivities playing hardly any role.

This was not the only time Dutch renegades returned to the Republic. Also in 1623, in November, the ship of Moerad Rais (Jan Jansz) arrived in Veere. When this news reached his wife and children in Haarlem, they rushed to Zeeland in an attempt to convince him to reconvert to Christianity and return to family life. Relatives of the other converted crewmembers joined them, but none of the renegades abandoned ship. Three years later Moerad was back. This time his three ships sought shelter in Rotterdam and Amsterdam, having sustained heavy damage in a skirmish with Dunkirk privateers. The two ships commanded by Moerad and his Vice-Admiral Matthijs van Bootel became icebound in the Amsterdam harbor and were forced to wait out the winter before returning to Salé. Van Bootel's wife was still living in Amsterdam at the time and perhaps she came to the ship. Appalled by the conditions on board, the Amsterdam council admitted injured crewmembers to the city hospital. The hospital records for this period no longer exist, so it is impossible to establish whether wounded renegades lay next to sick Amsterdammers during the harsh winter of 1623. During the 1620s, but probably also afterwards, converts continued to arrive in the Republic to take advantage of its maritime and commercial infrastructure, with little or no opposition from the authorities.

The aim here is not to point to exotic anecdotes, but to do the opposite: to stress how common such encounters between the converted and their Christian kin and former compatriots could be. These examples show the frequency and apparent ease with which these interactions took place, whether in the Dutch Republic or in North Africa. Renegades continued to engage with Christian Dutchmen and to be identifiable by their Dutch origins. Their "former" identity as part of the Dutch maritime world could be pinpointed, sometimes with great exactness: for instance, when, in November 1655, two Dutch naval commanders fought a North African corsair, they recognized him as the converted Jan Leendertsz or "Selleman," whose parents still lived in Amsterdam's harbor quarter, "close to the city inn, at the sign of the Black Raven."

Renegades as Interlocutors

Back in North Africa, Wijnant de Keyser, the inexperienced first Dutch consul to Algiers and Tunis, had the demanding task of implementing the 1612 capitulations, which included liberating all Dutch captives without the payment of ransom. Algiers, which had been under Ottoman rule for nearly a century when De Keyser arrived in 1617, was a stronghold protected by a wall and fortress, offering the corsair fleet an ideal operating base. Its ethnically diverse population of fifty thousand consisted mainly of original inhabitants (*baldi*), Iberian Moriscos and Jews, Ottoman Turks, renegades from every origin, and Christian captives. During the first half of the seventeenth century, *pashas* appointed by Istanbul nominally ruled Algiers. A janissary regiment represented Ottoman military power while the *raïs* whose activities were Algiers' main source of

income formed a second power bloc. De Keyser quickly realised how political matters stood. In his first report he informed his principals of his (limited) diplomatic scope, explaining that the *pasha*'s power was restricted and dependent on the *diwan*, council of janissaries, and the *ta'ifa*, council of the *raïs*. Any decisions on Algerian relations with the Dutch would be taken by these two bodies, so having inside supporters would be crucial.

Throughout his appointment, which lasted over ten years, De Keyser relied heavily on insiders such as dragomans and renegades. As one of his first actions as consul he hired a German convert to locate and identify Dutch captives in the Algerian homes and *bagno*s. When De Keyser within months of his arrival ended up in jail in retaliation for a Dutch naval attack, the renegade Soliman Rais, the above-mentioned *De Veenboer*, negotiated his release. Shaken by his imprisonment, De Keyser placed his trust in this convert who at that time commanded four or five ships and had a seat on the *ta'ifa* and access to the *diwan*. In the fall of 1617, he was even chosen as admiral of the Algerian corsairing fleet, a position that rotated. Soliman, to whom De Keyser referred as "my friend in the *diwan*," thus, was ideally positioned to act as a champion of the Dutch cause.

The renegade not only provided the consul with local inside information but also with relevant news gathered during his corsairing voyages. In the spring of 1617, he reported to De Keyser that, while at Chios, he had heard that the Dutch fleet had reached Istanbul and that the pro-Dutch Khalil Pasha had become grand vizier. Soliman pointed out that since Khalil was a good friend of Haga, the arrival of Ottoman instructions for the Algerians to make peace with the Dutch was imminent. He therefore told the consul to hold off on any actions until the Ottoman galleys arrived. To convince the States General of the veracity of this information, the consul acted as Soliman's character witness: he reported that the renegade did his utmost to assist him and although he still captured Dutch ships, he did not sell any of their crew into captivity, offering instead to transport liberated captives to the Republic. What was more, Soliman repeatedly expressed the wish to give up corsairing altogether and go into Dutch - Levantine trade instead.

Over the succeeding months, however, the relationship between the consul and the renegade soured. On 31 October 1617, the States General discussed a letter sent by Soliman Rais. Although Soliman claimed to write on behalf of the *diwan*, the letter's content as well as that of earlier ones by De Keyser suggest it was written on the renegade's own initiative and supported by other Algerian-based Dutch renegades. The letter was a detailed attack on the consul. Soliman Rais denounced his lack of assistance to Dutch traders: instead of protecting them, he had become their oppressor, due to his "blinding avarice." Soliman described in great detail a dispute between De Keyser and two Dutch shipmasters. Accusing the consul of fraudulent behavior, he defended the shipmasters and Dutch commercial interests in general.

What this episode demonstrates is that the renegade was not only well integrated into Algerian power structures; he was clearly also familiar with the current Dutch political reality. He used contacts within the Dutch navy to send off

two copies of his letter: one to the States General and another to Johan van Oldenbarnevelt, pensionary of Holland and the Republic's foremost politician at that time. Also, the files of the States General contain letters from well-positioned traders from Holland in support of the renegade's complaints, indicating that he did not launch an unprepared attack on the consul. The renegade Soliman belonged to a complex set of social, economic, and political networks, which stretched from the Ottoman Mediterranean and Algiers to the heart of Dutch politics and commercial interests.

Soliman put considerable rhetorical effort into convincing the States General of his good intentions. Interestingly, he does not once refer to his Christian past or directly to his conversion. He matter-of-factly referred to himself as "Turk," explaining how he and other Dutch renegades had liberated De Keyser from his imprisonment as soon as "we Turks" had returned from a corsairing expedition. Here the renegade used the term not as a denominator of a specific ethnic or religious identity but as a reference to his profession. And it was this professional capacity that allowed him to provide the Dutch government with pertinent information and services, hence it needed no justification.

Soliman's letter communicated that he had decided to defend not just the shipmasters in their quest for justice but also "our entire Dutch nation with all my resources and blood, here on land and at sea (…)." Although the "Torkxsche nation," which here might refer to either the Algerians in general or the *ta'ifa*, would not be able to accept it, Soliman had decided to support "our Dutchmen as long as God Almighty grants me life," the last part of the sentence indicating perhaps that, to the convert, the god of Muslims and Christians was one and the same. In any case, he proceeded to ask that another consul be appointed. Perhaps he even hoped to be considered a candidate despite having "turned Turk" in both the religious and professional senses of the word.

With this letter Soliman positioned himself right in the middle of Dutch-Algerian diplomatic affairs during the protracted negotiations that would eventually lead to the 1622 treaty. To have the support of an insider, a member of the *ta'ifa* and *diwan*, must have been an attractive prospect for the Dutch. Apparently persuaded by Soliman's arguments, the States General decided to fire De Keyser on 21 December 1617. For reasons unknown, however, he remained at his post for another ten years. Soliman, on the other hand, seems to have overplayed his hand with his involvement in Dutch diplomatic affairs. He was replaced as admiral and lost much of his standing among the Algerian corsairs. Nothing ever came of his plans to switch to trade, and ironically he died in battle against a Dutch ship three years later.

In 1618, roughly a year after the discussion of Soliman's letter in their assembly, the States General received a second complaint about consul De Keyser from another renegade. The convert Xabano Flamengo, part of the Tunisian *dey*'s court, offered to act as intermediary with his master Yusuf Dey, who ruled between 1609 and 1637. His young age had prevented him from offering his assistance sooner, Xabano wrote, but now his "great observance and continued affection for the fatherland made it impossible for him to withhold his services."

Tunis, more than Algiers, offered opportunities for social promotion to converted immigrants. Although theoretically subject to the Ottoman sultan, the *dey*, supported and chosen by the janissaries, was the actual ruler in the early seventeenth century. Because of Tunis' broader economic base, consisting not just of corsairing but also of trade and industry, the influence of the *raïs* was more limited here than in Algiers, leaving the *dey* almost monarchical power. Within Yusuf's court, Xabano was not the only Dutchman. The Amsterdam renegade Fendri Shaban was the *dey*'s right-hand man while Hendrick Jansen from Amsterdam was his secretary. Another Dutch convert, Murat Picinino Rais, formerly Ulbe Janszoon from Workum, had also taken full advantage of Tunis' open structure: in his twenty-seven years in Tunis, Murat had married the widow of his original master and acquired possessions and wealth. He used his considerable status to assist the Dutch envoy to Tunis, Cornelis Pijnacker in 1625 and 1626.

Xabano made no reference to a Christian past or his conversion, which probably had taken place when he was quite young. Instead, just as Soliman, he focused on the political realities of Dutch-North African relations. Displaying his own knowledge of Tunisian power structures and diplomatic insight, Xabano informed the States General that the *dey* had been offended both by recent Dutch naval actions against Tunisian ships and by the delayed arrival of official representatives. De Keyser had been appointed consul for both Algiers and Tunis but resided only in the former. According to the renegade, the consul gave The Hague insufficient information and did little to further the Dutch cause. By contrast, Xabano had worked hard to free Dutch skippers. Just as Soliman had done, Xabano was offering professional services, which were only enhanced by his conversion and embedded position, not diminished.

It is unclear whether Xabano wrote completely on his own accord, motivated out of love for his fatherland, as he himself suggested, or that the letter was an indirect attempt by Yusuf Dey, without risk of losing face, to persuade the States General to send better consular representation. Whatever the case, at a time when Dutch negotiations with both Tunis and Algiers were encountering difficulties, both Soliman and Xabano judged the first Dutch consul a weak diplomatic link and positioned themselves as intermediaries in the service of their *patria*.

Long-term relations

Communications with another convert allow tracing long-term relations between the States General and a renegade who in all but name became their resident representative on the Moroccan coast. During a career that spanned three decades, the privateer Jan Jansz became Moerad Rais, the North African corsair who evolved from aggressor to protector, adviser, and diplomatic mediator to the Dutch. Of all the Dutch renegades, his paper trail is the longest. Moerad started his corsairing career in Algiers, after taking over the command of Soliman Rais' fleet in 1618—perhaps because Soliman was planning some sort of return to the Dutch Republic—attacking Dutch ships and selling compatriots into captivity. At

the end of that year, Moerad left for Salé, which had blossomed after the collapse of the Moroccan central government and the settlement of Moriscos, expelled from Spain between 1609 and 1614.

At first, Moerad Rais operated as a representative of Mulay Zaydan, but as sultanic authority weakened he increasingly acted as an agent of the Dutch. First he stopped attacking their ships and from 1622 on, a year before his arrival in Veere, he became the confidant of all Dutch diplomats to Morocco. On 1 December 1622, Ambassador Albert Ruyl arrived at Salé, his first Moroccan port of call on a mission to liberate captives. His negotiations with the local governor quickly reached an impasse, but when Moerad Rais and his fleet sailed in on 14 December, Ruyl knew that his luck had changed. That day he wrote in his journal that the renegade would help him free "our people." The very next day, Moerad himself brought fifteen captives to the ambassador's ship. Some days later, he freed another thirty-two Dutchmen. Due to the renegade's intervention, within six months, there were no more Dutch captives held in Salé.

In August 1624, Moerad Rais traveled to Mulay Zaydan's encampment where the sultan appointed him admiral (*qabtan*) of the Salentine fleet. Perhaps this gesture represented the sultan's attempt to increase his influence over rebellious Salé; for Moerad it meant a significant rise in status. Mulay Zaydan also gave the renegade permission to protect Dutch interests. To bolster his position, and perhaps to support the sultan, Moerad Rais subsequently ordered large quantities of weapons and ammunition in the Republic through Jewish middlemen. At that point the States General started to engage him as their official representative in everything but name, asking him to perform duties similar to those of a consul, such as acting as witness for Dutch shipmasters and assisting efforts for the release of Dutch ships and goods.

Throughout his North African career Moerad Rais maintained close contact with Dutch political and diplomatic circles, offering services of mediation directly to the States General or their official representatives at a time when internal Moroccan unrest meant that observance of the 1610 treaty was highly problematic. In 1627 the Dutch asked his help in getting a Dutch ship, its cargo, and a cabin boy released. Moerad Rais wrote the States General that they would continue to enjoy his "favour and assistance and honor" in maintaining the Dutch-Moroccan treaty. Moerad underlined his commitment to the Dutch cause by making his own position more explicit. He promised that he would "stand by the fatherland until death. But I cannot do more than I do, because these people here are rebelling against the king. What the outcome will be, God only knows." Rhetorically, Moerad Rais distanced himself from the Salentines ("these people here") who both harmed Dutch interests and rebelled against Mulay Zaydan, while identifying the Dutch Republic as his "fatherland." Again, the rest of the letter contains no other references to a Christian past or to his conversion. Moerad was not looking for social integration or a return to Dutch political subjecthood; he was offering professional services only a highranking, powerful Dutch renegade could provide. Religious differences, once again, were not an issue. He signed his letter, in his own hand, as "your good friend Moeratteres."

After the 1627 rebellion Moerad remained in his position as Salentine admiral and even organized an independent *diwan*. He continued to combine his corsairing and his rising status in Salé with providing assistance to the Dutch. In April 1630 when Ambassador Jan Wendelsz arrived in Salé with the same instructions as Ruyl, he was notified that there were no Dutch captives there because Admiral Moerad Rais always freed them upon the arrival of the captured ships. The next Dutch ambassador to Morocco, Anthonis de Liedekerke, also made Salé his first port of call. He had instructions to negotiate a treaty with Sultan Muhammad al-Shayk, located in Marrakesh, and free an Amsterdam ship and its crew. Moerad, in the meantime, had risen to the position of governor of al-Walidiya, a fortified harbor south of Salé. Again, the Dutch ambassador began his mission by establishing direct contact with the renegade.

De Liedekerke had been planning to meet the renegade from the very start of his journey: his ship carried an unlikely passenger to Salé, Lijsbeth Jansz, one of Moerad's Haarlem-born daughters, who had made the journey with her brother-in-law. Within ten days after his arrival, De Liedekerke got a reply from Moerad, who then showed up in Salé with a large entourage. After an emotional reunion with his daughter, Moerad promised the ambassador sufficient water and provisions to journey to Marrakesh for a meeting with the sultan. Undoubtedly, he also shared political insights with De Liedekerke to facilitate his negotiations with Muhammad al-Shayk. After this meeting Moerad Rais, accompanied by Lijsbeth who had chosen to remain with her father, returned to his posting, only to fade from historical record. Bereft of his help, the Republic's relations with Salé would worsen over the succeeding years, often causing the Dutch to resort to naval force rather than diplomacy.

Conclusion

Cross-confessional relations after conversion have been viewed as inherently conflictual: when Italian renegades attacked the coastal regions of their native country, they were driven not by economic motives but by their "rancorous vendetta" against Christian compatriots, a recent study claimed. Yet although Dutch renegades did target Dutch commercial shipping, their attitude was more complex—perhaps also more pragmatic—than that of a rancorous vendetta. After conversion they frequented the Republic peacefully and with relative ease to sell booty, have their ships repaired, and obtain medical assistance. They remained in contact with family members and continued or constructed relations with fellow maritime professionals, former townsmen, and the highest political circles. To the Dutch Republic, converted corsairs might represent the occasional embarrassment, but the state's *Realpolitik*, principled defense of freedom of conscience at home, and the relative lack of Mediterranean expertise resulted in a greater willingness to incorporate renegades into their diplomatic network.

Obviously, the renegades' success as diplomatic brokers between Christian and Muslim lands depended on their standing within local North African power structures as well as their personal skill in juggling different, at times (seemingly)

conflicting, allegiances. In the early phases of Dutch-Algerian diplomacy Soliman Rais positioned himself as an advocate of the Dutch cause. Consul De Keyser at first could not operate without his input. However, Soliman, in offering his services to his country of birth and perhaps even contemplating some form of social reintegration as a Levantine merchant, seems to have overplayed his hand. After sending his letter to The Hague, the renegade lost much of his standing in Algiers and, as a consequence, could no longer offer the Dutch any inside information on the *ta'ifa*'s or *diwan*'s deliberations, leaving Dutch-Algerian negotiations to drag on for years.

Xabano Flamengo in Tunis, on the other hand, was not a corsairing captain but part of the *dey*'s courtly household. In all probability he did not act on his own initiative but was deemed an ideal spokesperson by Yusuf Dey in an attempt to revive negotiations with the Dutch. At the same time, however, Xabano supplied the States General with inside information on the Tunisian situation and the Dutch consul's actions—or lack thereof. Moerad Rais, by contrast, thrived in the volatile Moroccan political situation, becoming the primary supporter of the Dutch in Salé and their indispensable agent in freeing captured compatriots. Although the trajectories of these renegades' relations with their fatherland differ greatly, all three knew how to reach the highest echelons of Dutch politics, using their letters to advertise their inside knowledge of North African affairs. Instead of marginal figures caught in the dichotomy of a Christian past and a Muslim present, what emerges is a picture of renegade corsairs operating as part of a maritime world, filled with danger but also opportunities, which encompassed both the Islamic Mediterranean and the Dutch Republic. And despite their formal disapproval of apostasy, the States General's own direct correspondence with converts to Islam and reliance on their services calls for the renegades' integration into the narrative of Dutch diplomatic relations.